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# **SEMINAR REPORT**

**DDO SERIES:**

**AUTHENTICATION OF AGENT SOURCES**



**CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE**

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

9 August 1976

Seminar on Authentication of Agent Sources of Information

Is it necessary to introduce more structure, including perhaps Directorate-wide criteria or formal guidelines into the agent authentication process? This was the basic question posed to some 35 intelligence officers primarily from the DDO, but including representatives of OMS, OTS and the Office of Security, who gathered recently in OTR for an afternoon seminar on the subject of agent authentication.<sup>1</sup> The group consensus was decidedly against set criteria-- circumstances and interests in each agent case are different and set criteria would tend not to be an aid, but a straight-jacket. Still, improvement in understanding and attention to the process of authentication across the Directorate is needed, according to the seminar participants. It should be tackled in two ways: more focused training and more involvement in the process by other officers in the intelligence chain (reports officers and analysts, etc.) in addition to the case officer.

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The seminar was one in a series sponsored by the Center for the Study of Intelligence designed to be of interest to the Operations Directorate. A list of attendees at the session is attached to this report. An issues paper on the subject was circulated before the seminar was held; a copy is attached to this report.

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Training Needs

According to several seminar participants there is a lack of attention to the principle that the authentication process is a continuing obligation and should be a continuing focus of concern by the collectors. One way to overcome this would be to give more attention in training to the need to take all the applicable steps in the process as a matter of routine. As we do it now, the training for case officers does not include instruction in any formal, systematized authentication process as such, although trainees do get a two-hour block on some basic testing procedures. One reason for this lack of emphasis is the absence of written doctrinal material for training that sets forth a generally applicable, logical sequence of steps for authentication. Case histories, including nitty-gritty details of most of the steps in the process, are also lacking.

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A similar need for more training and familiarization was voiced in connection with psychological assessments. In response to the criticism that the psychological examinations frequently seem to result in assessment language so hedged as to be relatively useless as an authentication tool, the experts in the field contended that results could be improved if more care and preparation went into carefully outlining the objectives for each individual case being examined and in giving the experts proper data on the agent so that refined and useful questions could be developed.

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One-week courses are available to case officers on the use  
25X1A of the [redacted] an intelligence and personality measure-  
ment system.

Apart from the functional aspects of training, there were some attitudinal issues raised. One concerned the dynamics of the collection process, which some participants viewed as now favoring numbers of recruitments and numbers of reports from these recruitments rather than quality. The result is to build in a fear on the part of case officers of ruining the prospects of a recruitment and reporting operation by being too strict about authentication procedures. This can be the opening wedge for fabrications. Again, an educational effort might help reverse this attitude on the part of case officers by assuring them that the Agency is vitally interested and willing to reward a serious and responsible effort to cut off marginal reporting operations, because they will not stand strict authentication procedures including a close examination of the value and accuracy of the information. Indeed one participant suggested our training include the criteria used in journalism schools for proof of access and accuracy--where libel laws make the matter a serious one.

Other Links in the Chain

Several participants saw a weakness in the authentication process due to the lack of a central, responsible individual

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in each Division charged with overseeing authentication. Some present said they believed the case officer should be the responsible person. In the EA Division system--the only formalized authentication process required by any Division--the COS is designated as the responsible person. At least two participants questioned whether there was not a useful separation in authentication procedures to be observed in terms of the responsibility for authenticating a source (agent) and the authentication of his information. But others expressed the belief that the two are really inseparable and should not be isolated. In denied and semi-denied areas, where access to the agent is highly restricted, there is naturally more dependence upon examination of the information reported than in accessible and hospitable areas where the agent is in regular, unhurried contact with his case officer. But it was the general view that an education process is necessary in the Directorate to help develop understanding of the need for, and the practice of, bringing all elements into the authentication process that properly have a role. This includes the case officer, the Headquarters desk officers and reports officers, the analysts, [redacted] and the psychological assessment officers. The relationship might be expressed as follows:

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--the case officer: He is in most direct contact with the agent or prospective agent. He must be aware of the need to call in the other players in the process of authentication and to do his utmost to use all the tools available that can reasonably be applied to his agent as part of the process. Ideally, he should prepare each step in the most careful and meticulous manner, and not feel inhibited from finding negative as well as positive elements in his case. There should be no opprobrium attached to uncovering negative elements.

--the Headquarters desk officer: He should play a review role in each major development connected with the operation to assure that the case officer is not overlooking significant authentication aspects of the case and is properly calling upon the support available at Headquarters.

--the reports officer: He should assure that before an agent is "pitched" in a recruitment attempt there is really a potential that the agent can, or is likely to in the future, supply valuable, needed information. All too often this vital link is not established before

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recruitment, and the reports officer is asked to supply requirements for a recruited agent who does not have very valuable access for what the Agency really needs. This leads to demanding the unattainable from an agent and in turn creates a pressure on the agent to fabricate.

One participant in the seminar, who has worked as a reports officer with over 1000 agent sources of information, said he had seldom seen a reports officer have any power in the authentication process vis-a-vis the operation officer. Yet the reports officer who knows the operational background to the case should be in the best position to evaluate the agent's information both as to accuracy and value. Aside from the obvious measuring of value, regular checks on agent information should be a normal part of the reports officer work. A formal system to accomplish the latter was recommended for LA Division at one time but has not been implemented. If the information provided by the agent is neither accurate, nor needed, the operation should be halted. Tests of the accuracy and value of the information must be met with every agent source, no matter how many other steps in authentication have or have not been accomplished.

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--the analyst: He can assist in the evaluation of the information to assure that it meets the two essential criteria mentioned above. But most analysts need a considerably better understanding than they now possess of how to be more usefully critical and challenging of the information provided in clandestine service reporting. The seminar participants disagreed on how much information the Operations Directorate should provide the analyst in soliciting his cooperation in the evaluation of material. This led to a criticism of the source descriptions affixed to reports and to some comment that the Operations Directorate should educate the analyst on the use of source descriptions and what they really mean. Several participants suggested that a separate seminar in this series would be worthwhile on the "theory and use" of source descriptions.

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--the psychological advisory officers: In many operations one or more of the variety of assessments which can be made with the assistance of the Behavioral Activities Branch are useful in the authentication process. But there was disagreement on the importance of probing agent motivation by psychological assessments as part of the authentication process. One view was that motivation was usually too obscure to be useful in authentication. Others pointed out that it could help in establishing the extent of the bias in the reporting product of the agent. Changes in motivation, which can have a profound effect on the entire operation, can be reflected in a continuing series of psychological assessments.

#### The Importance of Definitions

It was clear to a number of the participants that some of our difficulties in authentication are traceable to a lack of uniform understanding of the meaning of elements in the

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process. Most of the seminar participants would agree with the following treatment of key terms:

Authentication: The process, to be useful and correct, is never completed and there is really no such thing as an authenticated source. The authentication of a source is a continuous process engaged in during the entire period of the agent's employment.

Agent/Collaborator: An agent is a reporting source who is controlled in the classic sense following a formal recruitment and who is in a formalized contractual basis with the Agency with some remuneration. Authentication of such agents should fully engage all the applicable steps in the process. On the other hand, collaborators, such as some agents of influence, high officials who have limited ideological grounds to cooperate as a friend, etc., may constitute a growing proportion of our intelligence sources. They are not so tightly "controlled" as the agent and may not have formalized contractual agreements with the Agency. As a result, they may not be getting as much authentication processing as their intelligence product should require.

Tests/Assessments: Many operational tests are just that, and are passed or failed by the agent. On the other hand, the word "test" tends to be used when what is really meant is an assessment--which is not a black/white process. Assessments of all kinds can be useful even if at first glance they tend to produce a negative image for the agent.

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Criteria and Guidelines: While there was a general reaction against establishing any formal system of rigid criteria on authentication which would be required and reported to Headquarters, a number of seminar participants saw the utility of developing a systematized set of guidelines (the individual steps of which were not compulsory, but were comprehensive) as a management tool to focus attention on the process and on the steps that could be used, and to enable training in their application to be systematized. This would be an encouragement to good tradecraft.

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

12 July 1976

Factors Related to the Authentication of Agent  
Sources of Information

Do We Need Criteria?

There is considerable disagreement among case officers as to whether criteria of general world-wide applicability can or should be developed. Some have expressed grave reservations about any attempt to create "dogma," fearing it would be mechanically applied and blind us to important individual differences in cases. One strong demonstration that general criteria might work is provided in an article in "Studies in Intelligence"<sup>1</sup> in which there is a striking parallelism shown between the complaints and needs of two such culturally different agents as a German and a Korean. On the other hand, there are strong arguments against universal criteria in the thrust of three other articles,<sup>2</sup> each about recruiting agents of different nationalities: a

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Soviet, a Chinese, and a Libyan. These articles suggest that the problems typical of dealing with these three nationalities are so different as to make similar authentication criteria impractical.

The most detailed work that has been done on the subject of authentication of agents was produced in the context of the Agency's mission in Vietnam and was tailored mainly to that unique situation. This literature has found its way into background reading for the operational training mission

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of the Office of Training [redacted]

although it is (probably correctly) not a formal part of the required reading or instruction. Despite the care with which this work was undertaken and the direct tailoring to the Vietnamese situation, experiences in Vietnam do not suggest that the effort was very successful in avoiding the recruitment and use of agents later found to be fabricators. The core concepts of this effort were converted into a guideline for the process of authenticating agents for all of the East Asia Division in 1973 and it has been applicable there since. What experiences has EA Division had in applying the criteria in Stations other than Vietnam? Have certain of the criteria proved more valid than others and have some criteria proved inapplicable in other Far East countries?

Normal Processes of Authentication:

The scattered literature available on the subject tends to focus on some generally applicable steps in the process

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of authenticating an agent source. The first group of such steps is research: the identification of and development of biographics on the individual, his documentation, the establishing of his access, the determination of what useful information he can provide, the inter-agency and local source checks, the Provisional Operational Approval (POA), the Personal Record Questionnaire (PRQ) part I and part II. Are any of these dispensable in the process of authentication? It has been said that the PRQ's have never been revised, despite the Agency's penchant for updating all its forms. The PRQ does not ask what steps in authentication have been completed. Does this document need changes, and should it contain a check list of some of the generally desirable steps in the authentication process?

All case officers seem to concur that there is no substitute for the case officer's thorough knowledge of the subject matter upon which the source is going to report, and of the agent and his personality in the fullest detail. Some case officers argue strongly that all that is needed is full, detailed and perceptive knowledge of the agent as a human being, and that no set criteria for authentication are useful. Is this belief widespread in the Agency and is it a well founded view?

A third aspect of the process of authentication of an agent is usually the evaluation of the information the agent

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produces. The evaluation can take many forms from checking against known information, checking against what other sources report, comparing with photography or evidence available in COMINT, to submitting the information for the judgment of analysts in Headquarters. Which of these or others are particularly useful? How well have the judgments of analysts in Headquarters served the purpose?

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Psychological Approaches:

On the scale of popularity with case officers, the series of psychological tests used in authenticating agents appears

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[redacted] Such tests as those sponsored

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25X1A by the Behavioral Activities Branch, [redacted] the graphological analysis approach, and finally the analysis of the content of the PRQ part III, are all part of the psychological group of tests sometimes used in authentication. There are case officers who find the resulting analysis of such tests entirely too inconclusive to be of much use. Still others believe they are totally useless and only provide the case officer with other ways of stating what he already does or should know about his agent or potential agent. Are the results of these psychological analyses too hedged in their language and would more unequivocal language be really useful?

There are a number of complaints and criticisms about our general operational approach to authenticating agents which may be worth airing in search of better methodologies. The most common of these criticisms is that there has been an alleged dangerous overemphasis upon recruitment in recent years. There is disagreement as to why this is dangerous, however. Some say that it encourages carelessness with the proper steps of authentication (or worse, their falsification); that contact reports are never written with firmly expressed doubts about the authenticity of a potential recruit. Has our training and supervisory approach instilled in the case officer the injudiciousness of this step when a healthy skepticism of agents is almost universally recognized as desirable? What is causing this? Another reason cited for the alleged danger of overemphasis upon recruitment is that

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it has simply failed to produce the quality of agent desirable. The charge is that our quality agents have not, in fact, been recruited by "gung ho" case officers with large numbers of recruitments to their credit. Still another explanation of the alleged danger is that it stresses the value of the "pitcher" (recruiter) over the value of the "extractor" (agent handler), placing the importance of the latter too low and thus undermining the intelligence product.

Critical Points:

Some have noted that there are several critical points involved in any vigorous authentication process. One is the danger of probing the agent's motivation to the point of creating agent hostility. A second is pressing the agent to produce to the point that he is frightened to admit he cannot get some piece of information which is a prelude to fabrication. There are also those case officers who believe we have taught and continue to teach entirely too much to our agents, thus creating throughout the world a cadre of well-trained agents who know all too well how to make fabrication believable. Is this a generally shared view? Still another danger is seen in too much quantifying of everything, in terms of numbers of agents recruited, numbers of reports turned in, numerical value of the reports, grade averages of agents, projects, stations, branches, and divisions, all of which, it is charged, leaves hollow and empty the real

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value of the information collected. Is this a legitimate criticism? Finally, a danger of particular consequence for those engaged in hard-target recruitment is the frequent problem of shortness of time available before a target returns to his homeland. This can lead to the elimination of testing and authentication steps that would otherwise be taken.

#### **Fabrication:**

Fabrications are an endemic problem with which the Agency will have to deal so long as there is a market for intelligence information. Little change in thinking about this problem has taken place since the classic piece done on the subject in the 1950's [redacted] We have apparently found from experience that some agents start out as fabricators, but most of them seem to lose their access or run out of information at some stage and then turn to fabrication. Does this really hold true, and if so, does it imply that we are pushing the agent too hard to get what he can't get, and/or training him so well he can invent what we want? Is fabrication always due to the delinquency of a case officer? Most fabrication appears to be uncovered by

<sup>3</sup>"Fabrications, Paper Mills and Imposters," (July 1970 version is in OSL-2047A), [redacted] wrote the basic piece in the first half of the 1950's.

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case officers in their operational dealings with the agent, rather than by intelligence analysts pouring over the reported information. Is this generally the case, and if so, why are so few fabrications tripped up on the basis of the information itself? Is the Agency failing to provide careful enough scrutiny of the contents of its intelligence reports for fabrication, and if so, where should this responsibility lie, with the reports officer or the DDI analyst?

Control and Motivation:

The issue of control and motivation figures largely in any consideration of authentication of an agent and may be worth discussion at the seminar. Most case officers believe a monetary motivation is best for control purposes because this type of agent motivation is usually the easiest to handle and exploit. The least popular control seems to be the use of coercion; few agents controlled by coercion have ever been successfully run for long. Between these extremes fall other possible elements of control and motivation. The ideological motivation is very common, but may be becoming increasingly difficult to handle in an age when U.S. foreign policy changes (detente) make re-recruitment repeatedly necessary, and not always successful. Personal security, religion, shared values with an international basis,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Anti-atomic warfare, disarmament, anti-biological/chemical warfare, ecology, pollution, and economic interdependence are concepts that would fit into this category.

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adventurism, and finally, "any motivation that may exist" have all been mentioned. Is control and motivation undergoing fundamental changes as the U.S. becomes a less popular moral symbol with conflicts with the underdeveloped world in which many of our operations are now run? Are adventurism and other motivations likely to increase in importance for our agents, and if so what does this mean for control?

Source Descriptions:

There is no very clearly defined point at which the appropriate officers decide to circulate the intelligence information provided by a source while describing that source as untested, or "reliability not established." There is also no agreement on when the step should be taken to describe the source as fairly reliable, and from there to graduate him to more confident assessments. In fact, there is an interesting division of opinion as to whether the information or the source is the most important thing being authenticated. One former division reports chief believed that if the source was trustworthy and discriminatory about his own sub-sources of information and careful about what he passed on to us, then the information--regardless of what it was--should be authenticated as reliable because it came through a reliable channel of acquisition. Others believe that some agents may well be incapable of discrimination about the information that comes into their possession, and are mere couriers or

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conveyors of a volume of information from which we must choose for our best intelligence. There are obvious gradients between these extremes. Are there useful guides to points in the process of agent authentication when certain steps in dissemination of intelligence from an agent should be taken? Are such guides generally applicable to all operations around the world?

There are probably other topics of significance in the authentication of agents which have not been mentioned in this paper, and a discussion of these will be welcomed at the seminar.

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